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**INDULGENCE  
IN ORNAMENT.**

MARY GAY HUMPHREYS.

THERE is no theory of the universe that does not admit man's love of ornament as an integral part of his nature. Whether the record is Biblical, and Isaac is recorded as tempting Rebekah with jewels of silver and gold, or as in Tyler's Primitive Races, the lowest savage rejoices in his gaily tinted skin, almost the first expressions of intelligence are found to take this personal form. Supported by fundamental facts of this kind, no plea need be set forth in support of ornamental decoration. Or, if these were not found in anthropology, nature, furnishing inexhaustible suggestions and stimulating the mind to action, would give the reasons of its existence.

Historical ornament is one of the invaluable aids to an enlarged view of man and his relative place on the earth. It is not only the expression of his taste, and of the state of civilization of which he is a part, but illustrates the more remote questions of his religion and morals. Such interpretations are found in Egyptian art, of the teachings of the priest-

hood. The Moor reads the sentences of the Koran, and studies its precepts in the arabesques of the Alhambra. Greek ornament is as eloquent in its pure state of the open, temperate, free life of the age which built the Parthenon, as the Roccoco decoration of the time of Louis XV. of a heated, luxurious and corrupt generation, on the brink of a social upheaval.

The fact that ornament is the unconscious expression of any age, renders it of added value as a truthful index for the historian or student of morals. Thus the study of styles and their formation become something more than a pastime, since ornament proves to be one of the most enduring records of an age or nation.

The three greatest illustrative types of ornament also illustrate its most free and abundant use. These are Indian ornament, the most remarkable development and use of color; Gothic ornament as it relates to form; and Moorish decoration, the most perfect of all ornament in its combination of color and form.

An Indian shawl, such as is found outside of their production under English and French commercial influences, is a common and one of the best instances of the extent to which ornament can be freely used. An Indian shawl is simply a mass of ornament combined toward a certain end, which is the charm of color. If analyzed and described in detail, there is found to be a heterogenous collection of the most diverse elements. Forms opposed and incongruous colors are brought together. But so fine is the Indian instinct for color, and so accurate is its sense of proportion in distributing the various forms, that the result is simply an agreeable perception of bloom, which refuses to be named by any single color term. The principles which underlie the apparent spontaneity of Indian ornament are among the most valuable possessions of the arts of design. It is no place here to enumerate these, but only to show, that when guided by them, how freely ornament may be used, and yet remain pure and healthy.

What is true of Indian ornament with regard to color is true of Gothic ornament in respect to form, with a difference. While in Indian ornament we find the expression of almost a national instinct, Gothic ornament is in a degree the expression of individual minds, but acted upon by the same powerful influences. While the one appeals chiefly to the senses the other appeals to the imagination. To take a common instance, outside of the Cathedral of Milan is a carved band of stone; it is, in fact, one of the least important decorations of the building, and was probably given over most unreservedly into the hands of the different workmen employed on it. In an idle moment it will repay any one to stroll around the building and study this band, which is scarcely four feet above the foundations, and observe the wealth of its carving and the evidences of individual expression. In numerous buildings in Germany, and in odd and unlooked for parts of the Cologne Cathedral, a curiously carved gargoyle, or piece of grotesquerie, will witness to the grim humor of the workmen when, as if wearied with angel heads and cherubs, he has in this way revenged himself. The same waywardness is to be found in many of the richly illuminated works by the monks, when some floriation, possibly surrounding a saint's head, will terminate in a sly and carefully introduced joke. But so perfect is the technical skill, and so accurately is the whole work balanced and proportioned, that it loses nothing of beauty, elegance or grandeur.

But nothing so finely illustrates the freedom with which ornament can be used, as Moorish decoration, both in respect to color and form. A Moorish arch, one of the familiar examples from the Alhambra, will be covered with decoration, yet so subtly treated that each part in turn serves to relieve the rest, at the same time the same motive will be repeated throughout, yet without monotony. The color which is used to relieve these forms can be resolved into a few simple axioms, as red outside, blue in the shadows, gold in depths, white on the vertical planes, entirely reversing the principles of color in Indian ornament, while each illustrates the perfection of art of its kind.

Such great types arise from the fertility of healthy well balanced imaginations. Poverty in ornament is not the result of chasteness or simplicity, but of feeble imagination, while incoherence proceeds from degraded and dimmed perceptions.

There has been scarcely time enough to take account of the present era of decoration. Its revival is too apparent to require any evidences on paper, and in many instances displays a good deal of unintelligible enthusiasm. But it is unfair to judge of its tendencies from the ornamentation of coal scuttles, or the excrescences of seaside cottages, fondly fancied to be "Queen Anne" or "Early English." Even in these there is an audacity and freedom from out of which something may spring. Beneath all this there is an earnest movement which shows some sturdy germs of a new growth, although it is too soon to speak of an American school. The hope of this movement is in the adaptation of new motives, and every new school has shown itself in this way. The lotos, the acanthus leaf, the ivy, the laurel, have each signified new ideas and expressions. Rightly seen there are but few things not capable of significant ornament. Among the collection of architectural casts loaned by Mr. R. M. Hunt to the Metropolitan Museum is a vertical ornament, firmly balanced, excellent in arrangement and in effect elegant, in which pots, pans, rakes and hoes, among the floriations, are as artistic and beautiful as Greek vases and Cupids. This piece of realism suggests—although nothing so charming has yet been attempted—much of the best modern decoration in this country.

The Harvard Memorial windows, executed by Mr. John LaFarge, is another instance of that delicate blending of realism and decorative effect, difficult to express in words. The windows are splendidly decorative, but added to the superb color is the fire of action, and the realization of perspective, yet without interfering with the chief and primary end attained.

Some conspicuous examples will illustrate this selection of new motives and their treatment, which is characteristic of what is desired to be understood by the tendency toward a new school.

The first is the wall paper designed by Mrs. Wheeler, which received the prize in the competition of last Spring. This had a double value, first in its motive, honeycomb, bees and red clover, treated with a realism which finds no parallel in English and French work, but which does not offend by suggestions of picturesqueness, and second, in its new and agreeable color scheme.

In Cincinnati, the wild parsnip and succory has been found to have as fine suggestiveness as the clustering acanthus leaf; while the Ohio buckeye proved as beautiful an ornament in wood carving as the oak.

This is not a new idea; when the Capitol was building at Washington, Jefferson wrote to the architect suggesting Indian corn and the tobacco plant as architectural ornaments. His suggestions were followed, and, although clumsily executed, the value of the idea remains the same, and is being more perfectly fulfilled to-day.

This is not the age of gods and goddesses, of cherubs and cupids, of Greek vases or of Griffins. This is the age of corn, wheat, oats, tobacco, of the pick and shovel, of the telescope and microscope, and the wonderful revelations of science.

Tennyson has made himself the poet of his age by recognizing the poetry of these. Couture in his valuable lectures sees the artistic side of the laborer as the chief factor in the busy present, and the necessity of representing him as one of the artistic features which the world to-day presents.

The decorative arts, to take their place among other arts, cannot be behind the age. To the student, historical ornament is of value in familiarizing him with styles, and in furnishing him with the immutable principles which are the product of the essays of centuries. Beyond this it can give him nothing. But he that can give beautiful and artistic expression to a modern idea, or transform into something beautiful that which in itself is homely and unattractive, but representative of our time and generation, has done that which ennobles and dignifies our new enthusiasm for decoration, and gives it a value which will outlast both this new fervor and ourselves.

PRESSED and cut plushes, have modeled upon them the heads of animals and birds. This is a novelty that certainly will make up into most artistic and attractive goods.

Why not arrange some valves, so that the average house help (?) can shut off the noises of the ordinary steam heating coils and registers? How pleasant it would be to enjoy our morning naps, without the rude awakening that always follows the first turning on of the steam.

THE border panel shown above was designed by Mr. Charles Volkmar, and is intended for a fire-place or under mantel. The design is an attractive and pleasing one, and a fair sample of Mr. Volkmar's work. This gentleman, by the way, is now hand-painting several thousand plaques, to be given away at the anniversary performance at one of our leading theatres.

